

# YALI Voices Podcast: You're not born with self-confidence. You build it, says Ugandan entrepreneur.

(Courtesy of Jamila Mayanja)



Jamila Mayanja started her working life by boldly approaching a prospective employer and telling him she could do anything his company required. “Teach me and I will learn it in 30 minutes,” she said.

It was an unusual move for a woman in Uganda, where “the survival mode is be beautiful, get ready for marriage, stay in marriage, be respectful,” she told the State Department’s Macon Phillips in a YALI Voices podcast.

The 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow went on to found [Smart Girls Uganda](#), where she empowers young girls and women through training to build their self-esteem.

Many have the impression that self-confidence is something you are born with. “No, you can actually build it,” she told Phillips. Her passion has been to encourage girls to pursue their dreams and create their own initiatives.

Mayanja shared a funny story about how her aversion to doing laundry led her to start a franchise company through Smart Girls Uganda called J Mobile Laundry Services that is helping to address women’s unemployment in Kampala. With the help of the YALI Network, she plans to open the country’s first laundromat, consulting with other Mandela Washington Fellows to make it environmentally friendly as well as incorporate it into her training center, where women are planning their own businesses.

“Everything is quite YALI-branded,” she said.

Learn more about Mayanja and her remarkable achievements, including the [Haven Anti-AIDS Foundation](#) she co-founded to empower youth in the fight against HIV/AIDS, illiteracy and poverty.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAMS (IIP)

“YALI Voices Podcast: Jamila Mayanja”

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[MUSIC PLAYING]

♪ Yes we can. Sure we can. ♪

♪ Change the world. ♪

[MUSIC CONTINUES]

MACON PHILLIPS: Greetings, young African leaders. This is the YALI Voices Podcast, your home for sharing the best stories from the Young African Leaders Initiative Network. I'm Macon Phillips and I'm happy to have you here with me today. Before we get started, don't forget to subscribe to the podcast on iTunes and Google Play. And visit [YALI.state.gov](http://YALI.state.gov) to stay up to date on all things YALI. And if you like what we're doing here, take a moment to recommend this all to your friends.

Today, I'm joined by Jamila Mayanja. Jamila is the CEO of Smart Girls Uganda, a company that not only trains women and girls in entrepreneurship, but also in life skills, to empower them and build their self-esteem. In addition to that, Jamila created a franchise company, founded an organization that sensitized youth about AIDS, and organized Uganda's first father-daughter dance to showcase the importance of fathers in their daughters' lives. Now, my conversation with Jamila Mayanja.

So hello everybody. This is Macon Phillips. I'm here in Washington, DC, with Jamila Mayanja, who is a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow, but has come back to the United States for an entrepreneurship conference that we'll hear a little bit more about. Really excited to have you here in our offices here at the State Department. Welcome. It's good to have you, Jamila.

JAMILA MAYANJA: It's good to be here. I'm so excited to meet the YALI Network people behind the scenes.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes — see the actual sausage being made, as it were.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah. It's so cool.

MR. PHILLIPS: And we are really excited to have you here because there is oftentimes this distance, geographical and —

MS. MAYANJA: Huge distance

MR. PHILLIPS: — and otherwise, yeah, that we want to have this relationship with young leaders across Africa and we've developed a program that has this exchange program that brought you here, that has the Regional Leadership Centers in Africa in a number of different locations — Dakar, Accra, Nairobi, Johannesburg. And we also have this virtual network, the YALI Network. And each of these areas has been really exciting, but it's sometimes difficult to really keep that connection when a key part of the relationship is so far away.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah. That's so true.

MR. PHILLIPS: So it's nice to have you here in person.

MS. MAYANJA: I'm so happy to be here.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah. How long have you been in the States this time?

MS. MAYANJA: Just a week.

MR. PHILLIPS: This is your — is this your second time? Was the Mandela Washington Fellowship your first time in the United States?

MS. MAYANJA: Yes, actually, yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: So this is one of the things that I'm always curious about, which is as someone who had never been to the United States before but probably paid attention to it and was interested in it, what was the biggest surprise to you, you know, getting off the plane at the airport and kind of spending the first few days here?

MS. MAYANJA: The biggest surprise was the fact that there were homeless people in the United States. People don't actually believe it back home, but there are actually homeless people in the United States. They actually were in the streets begging. When we were in Dartmouth, when they took us for the community service, which is the best thing I think that YALI does for the community service, there are actually people who starve. So it is amazing to see some of the problems that happen in Africa actually happen in the United States. And also there were jobless people, people who were looking for jobs. Now that bit me off. I thought everybody in the U.S. had a job.

MR. PHILLIPS: Now, one of the things that you may not know about me is that I actually lived in Norwich, Vermont —

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS:—which is where Dartmouth — it's across the river from where Dartmouth is.

MS. MAYANJA: We actually visited Vermont.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah, and so Dartmouth University is a great school that's located in Hanover, New Hampshire. And as part of your Mandela Washington Fellow experience, you spent six weeks there with 24 other young leaders.

MS. MAYANJA: Yes.

MR. PHILLIPS: And in 2002, I lived in Norwich, Vermont. And what brought me there was being in AmeriCorps VISTA. And AmeriCorps is a program that actually works on poverty in the United States. And so I spent my time working with young children who lived in government-funded housing projects in that area. And we actually would find students at Dartmouth and match them up as mentors to these young people so they had a good example of what to do. So I actually know the issue of poverty in the Dartmouth area firsthand and I can confirm that has been the case for quite a while.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah. It was amazing. I really loved what Dartmouth did for us, for all the charity work that we did there, visiting the different people who wouldn't survive in winter, visiting with people who didn't have access to food. It was quite amazing. Then we visited a city called Burlington, I think.

MR. PHILLIPS: I lived in Burlington for four years.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah, and there were so many homeless people on the streets. And you'd think those

things wouldn't happen in that, like, powerful United States.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, why do you think it does?

MS. MAYANJA: I think it's the world. We are all the same people, and not everybody has the same status. Like, you think you live in — we—the world is like one bubble, one — actually one bubble. You'd think there is nobody who is higher, who is better. Every part has its own challenges and—yeah, actually, every part has its own challenges. So it's the way — how we overcome them, and in Uganda how we also try to make sure we overcome them. So you'd think there's no perfect place, there's no perfect bubble. It's how people actually work out their problems in whatever part of the world they are in.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah, that's right. That's — I couldn't agree with you more.

So let's use that as a jumping off point into your own life. And you talk about, it's not about the circumstances you're in but how you respond to them, how you overcome those challenges. And you've certainly become quite an accomplished entrepreneur and a leader, someone who's quite inspiring to Americans, to Ugandans, to girls, to —

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, wow.

MR. PHILLIPS:—to people trying to clean clothes, and all the way to the president of the United States. And we'll get to that in a second. But I imagine it wasn't always that glamorous and awesome.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Tell us a little bit about where you are coming from and how that's something that's motivated you.

MS. MAYANJA: I come from a family of 14 brothers and sisters. My dad had three wives. My mom was the second wife. And later, my dad died in my first year, first semester. And when he died — he was quite an amazing guy. I always was quite — quite wondered how he took us all through good schools, the 14 kids. And he actually had more kids he was looking after. So I was quite amazed at how that one man managed to do all that. Good kids and we still got fed. But when we lost him in — first I lost my real mom when I was in S3 and now I stayed with my amazing other mom, who is the heart and body and soul of everything that I breathe right now. But the biggest challenge was losing my dad in my first year, first semester at campus. He had just taken me to a very expensive university, that was Makerere Business School, and a very expensive hostel. And there he dies and the money just somehow disappeared. I really had to survive. And I noticed—I couldn't try and get back to my mom, tell her, "You know what"—because she also was depressed. How is she going to take care of all these other kids?

And I think that motivated me. But even before that, when I was in school, I was in an all-girls school. I lived with girls that came from, like, all different backgrounds, and I somehow would pull them towards me. I would always give a listening hand. I was on every cabinet of every club in school. And I even started, I remember, an AIDS club that later I called the Red Ribbon Club because when I called it the AIDS Club, nobody actually came to the first meeting. So I had to

rebrand it. They kept on saying, since I called it the AIDS Club, it's only people with AIDS. Yet I just wanted to show these people because they're young, they can get AIDS. So when I rebranded it, so —

MR. PHILLIPS: That's a — let's just dive in on that for a second.

MS. MAYANJA: [LAUGHING]

MR. PHILLIPS: I think that's a really important lesson is that sometimes the way you present something —

MS. MAYANJA: Exactly. Exactly.

MR. PHILLIPS:—is really, really important. So I think that's a good takeaway for people who want to — if you want to fight AIDS and you want to focus on that issue, maybe don't call your mission the AIDS Club.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Maybe think of a much more interesting way to approach that.

MS. MAYANJA: [LAUGHING] I remember sitting in the classroom for my first meeting after putting up flyers and everything, because after being on every cabinet of every club, I wanted something of my own that I've studied in school. And I was there alone, literally. Not even my best friend came. But later, when I talked to the [INAUDIBLE], it's like, maybe it's the name. And then I went to lead a survey and asked the students, "Why didn't you come to my meetings?" Like, "My dear, there's a rumor going around that you started the AIDS Club because maybe you have AIDS or you're actually looking out for AIDS people, people with HIV/AIDS, and it's going to make us so unfamous." So I went back and rebranded.

So I think my zeal to try and create different, to try and be different, was from school.

MR. PHILLIPS: I think that there's also another lesson in that, leaving aside the branding itself, it's something that the American technology sector is really focused on right now, but in general, which is this idea of really understanding your target audience, I mean, really actually understanding your mission, what you're trying to do, addressing a certain issue, but having the humility and the curiosity to actually talk to the people you're seeking to motivate and ask them what they think of it and then design something that meets their needs. And I think too often — and I say this as someone who's seen this a lot in the U.S. government and other places — we all sit around and try to cook up what we think is going to be great without talking to the people we're trying to reach in the first place. And that kind of feedback is really important at all steps of an organization, whether you're doing a high school club or you're trying to start a business or otherwise. So I think that's a really important lesson for people to take away.

MS. MAYANJA: Thank you. And I think also that bonded my relationship with the headmistress of my high school, and whatever program I bring to the school, I'm always welcomed with open arms, yeah, because I left a huge impact in the school. And later, as much as I also later a club still—also the A-level counselor. So I was literally always someone's, like, mother all over the school. And also the teachers themselves and even the staff — right now I go back and I start working from the gate.

MR. PHILLIPS: Right.

MS. MAYANJA: Which is very cool. But all that, when I reached campus, really kind of faded away when I lost my dad. I thought when I would leave high school, I would still carry on what I was doing back in school, but I couldn't now. I moved into survival mode. I had to survive because now I had really nothing. I was glad that my uncle, like, my dad's brother took up to pay my tuition. But that's all he could do. I had to look for upkeep.

So, one of these days — I woke up one day and I was like, "Let me go and look for work." I walked into someone's office, my first boss ever, the first job I've ever looked for. I told him, "I can do anything that what your company is doing. Teach me and I will learn it in 30 minutes." And he was amazed this young girl who is in first year. She doesn't even have any papers and I'm telling him that. He's like, "First, have these flyers and go down there and try and get 10 clients. If you get 10 clients, actually more than 10, you have the job." And I got them in, I think, two hours. When I got them in two hours, he's like, "Sit down, let me teach you the software," and I learned it in 15 minutes. He was amazed. Then he made me the receptionist and the sales girl.

And from that day on, I kept on climbing ladders in his company and helping grow his company. But still when I was in that company, I wasn't satisfied. I would always volunteer, go volunteer in stuff that are organized by the U.S. Embassy. I co-founded an organization that now I'm a board member of, called Haven Anti-AIDS Foundation.

I was never satisfied when I was doing, like, business for my former boss because — later, in my third year, he promoted me to being marketing manager of his company, but even when he was — he wasn't doing any corporate social responsibility. It's me who introduced it there. To say it, I was never satisfied as much as now I was able to look after myself, give some more money to my mom so that my siblings can go to school. It was never really satisfying in my heart. I did a lot of back and forth courses to improve myself in being a counselor, in being a trainer online.

So, in 2012, before I — after I graduated, I decided to quit my job. My mom was in shock. [LAUGHING] She told me, "Are you crazy?" And I'm like, "I'm not crazy." She told me, "But you are getting money; you can look after yourself. You don't need anyone." I'm like, "But I'm not happy." As much as I loved my work so much — because later, the guy who had set up the company, we had built it so much, he sold it for so much money, and my new bosses were also amazing, but I was never literally fully satisfied. And I remember, she almost — in Islam, we call it a dua. She almost did for me a dua to stay and to actually change my decision. And I told her what I was going to do. She told me, "But you're already giving back in your own way." I told her, "I'm not happy."

So I started Smart Girls Uganda after that. I noticed even when I was at my company, I always had girls around me, talking to girls. I liked — I felt bad that even the girls I was working with didn't have enough confidence to speak out, to chase for their dreams. I met so many brilliant girls who couldn't get out of the job market to start and create their own initiatives. So I was, like, let me start Smart Girls Uganda to empower girls in all aspects of life.

MR. PHILLIPS: You don't strike me as someone who has that problem yourself.

MS. MAYANJA: I had it when — somehow all the things I did, I was kind of hiding my self-confidence issues a bit, because being in a big family, you tend to try and close yourself. So I would use cool to

try and build my own confidence. I didn't know that in the things that I was doing, I kind of was building my own confidence in a way, I think.

MR. PHILLIPS: And so what do you take away from your own style and your own background as you're trying to grow the capacity of these young girls to be as confident as you are? What's the quality you're trying to pass along to them?

MS. MAYANJA: The quality mostly is don't be afraid to accept that maybe you have loss of esteem and you can build it yourself. People say having self-confidence is — you're actually born with it. No, you can actually build it. And don't be afraid to fail, to get up. Don't be afraid to use the problems in your life to actually push you beyond your own capacity.

MR. PHILLIPS: Are there any tricks or any sort of very specific tips that you have for people who are struggling with their self-confidence? You know, look in the mirror and yell at yourself —

MS. MAYANJA: [LAUGHING]

MR. PHILLIPS:—and say, "You're great!" or whatever? You know, what are some tips and tricks you tell people?

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, you are so cool. What I used to do at school, whenever I was walking to class, I'd say, "Hi Jamila. You are amazing. Oh my God!" [LAUGHING] I'd literally shout a hallelujah for myself when I was walking. And then I would tell people, "You know I'm amazing?" Like, I would literally stop people and, "By the way, seriously, I'm so cool. I can't even believe myself." So, I would assure myself by telling other people. And people believed it, like literally. And in the morning, whenever I would wake up, I don't wake up myself by grueling. I wake up to, "You're amazing Jamila." So I would give myself those things I felt other people did have.

I remember I've always been, what in our country would say small. I was always bigger than the people in my class. So I would call myself — I watched this movie. I called myself "fat beautiful Madame." So — and always called myself like smart. So whenever I was walking, I would always acknowledge myself, and whenever I was in the presence of other people, before they acknowledge me, I would really tell them, "I'm actually amazing. You really don't have to tell me, but thank you so much. I'm cool." So I think you just have to acclimate yourself before others do, so.

MR. PHILLIPS: That's really interesting. I mean, that's — yeah, I think that's really good advice for people to think about the fact that they're amazing, but also one level underneath that, what makes them amazing, you know, to drill in on, you know, your different skills and the things that really make you stand apart and be proactive and own that. That's yours.

MS. MAYANJA: Thank you.

MR. PHILLIPS: It's something to be proud of, you know.

Okay, so you weren't satisfied and then you left and you started Smart Girls Uganda, really focused on how you can empower young girls and women.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Paint a picture for me about the world that a young girl finds herself in in Uganda. I've been there and I don't think the United States is perfect by any means, but I know that, in many ways, Uganda is more challenging for young girls and women.

MS. MAYANJA: For young girls, yeah. Why I did that mostly — when you're young, the girls, you are, practically in Uganda, you're brought up for marriage. Can you imagine most men in Uganda, fathers, educate their girls because they want to make them, like, have a good CV for marriage, that when a man comes to marry them off, they tell them, "You know, my daughter even has a degree, so that counts for big dowry." So there is this picture already painted for girls' future that — I actually tell fathers, "I don't know why you're educating your girl to actually go for marriage. Educate her to have her career and be successful."

And even when girls, yes, you know, when hormones kick in and maybe you get a baby very young, there you have no ticket to actually finish your career. You're tarnished in the environment. If you do not get a rich man to marry you, to actually get you your own business, you're actually a failure in the community. And then so many girls have what is shown on internet, what is shown on media. The girls are taken to be branded that that's all they are supposed to be is marriage material. And if you are marriage material later on and you also don't look after yourself, then the man is actually going to get another woman and add on to you. So the survival mode is be beautiful, get ready for marriage, stay in marriage, be respectful. And even some girls, when they get into marriage, they never — when they decide, "We are done and out," they never come out with anything. When they leave the family because they are put into marriage, it's like you no longer have access to your father's property, and then you become the property of the guy, and the guy himself doesn't sometimes in the end doesn't like you, gets you off, then gender-based violence. It's too much.

And then also for the rural girls, since — if they don't have enough money to take the girls in school, to take the whole family in school, it's the girl that will stay home. So the boys go to school because they believe later, they will easily get jobs. Oh, it's so much. And even girls if they are educated and they fight the gender norms of not getting married, getting jobs is actually hard. They use their bodies to survive, to get jobs, to survive into the job industry. It takes a strong, smart girl to actually survive in Uganda.

MR. PHILLIPS: So, you paint a pretty dark picture there, but having been working in the space for a while and having grown up in Uganda, do you feel like things are getting better?

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: And why? I mean, what are the — we talk a lot about the problems, but what are some of the solutions? What are some of the things that you think have made a very positive impact on this larger problem?

MS. MAYANJA: What is getting better now also are parents now. Most people who are parents now are educated, are now informed, and now they know better. The religious leaders also now know better, I would say. So many organizations and so many people like me who are fighting this issue. So there is this quite good awareness that is going around, I would say.

Let me say, actually the education, the fact that people — the media itself has penetrated even the rural areas. So the picture's been shown that this is bad and you need better. And now also the



survival mode has kicked in. Most people — men who are getting married now realize it's not only them to work. It's okay to let your wife work. And they see they can live better that way. So people are being educated more and being informed more now, yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Got it, okay. And so, your work on the Smart Girls Uganda really focused on this issue of women's empowerment, but then you moved beyond simply this company focus on building self-esteem into a company focused on cleaning clothes.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: So how did you find yourself in the laundry business?

MS. MAYANJA: So, get this. While I was doing my work — because with Smart Girls, I give them life skills training and business and entrepreneurship training, right? When I was doing that business and entrepreneurship training, I noticed that the ladies and the women were not actually implementing what I was doing. But I was kind of trying to ignore it. Later in the process, I got married, my amazing, handsome husband. And when I got married, I had to do chores, and the chores meant I had to wash clothes, and I really hate washing clothes, oh my God. I told my husband, if he has to divorce me, I think that's one thing he would divorce me for. And then he's like, "No, there's a solution. Let's get a lady to wash your clothes and it's okay. We'll pay her some little money." And that's what I did. I got a lady in the neighborhood and she did my washing, hand-washing, because, you know, dry cleaners are quite expensive.

So, three months down the road, the lady comes back and tells me, "Oh, Madame, by the way, I think I'm going to get you someone else to wash your clothes because with the money that you've been paying me, I've started a market stall." I was like, "What? Seriously?" [LAUGHING] She's like, "Yeah. Yeah, I've saved up and I've actually started that." And that's when I got the "aha" moment." I was like, "Do you know what?" I told her, "Do you know what, we can start this into a business. Let me test it because I have gotten so many ladies telling me you're training us but we don't have the capital to actually start." And that's — and I've been being messed up with—I had [INAUDIBLE] and were trained to figure out how the youth and the women can start businesses at a very low capital. And it was also working out.

So I sat down with this lady, got 10,000 shillings. That's like three dollars, and I gave her 6,000 to go and look for, like, five more ladies. And then I used the 4,000 for air time to call a few of my friends to see if they needed the service, like, if they hated washing like how I did. And I was happy to get, like, — it was mostly men who were full bachelors, were like, "Oh my God, what have you been waiting for? I've been dying here actually, have two week's clothes." And then that's when I started J Mobile Laundry Service. And the ladies started slowly, slowly doing door-to-door laundry service for the clients I would get. And on the weekends, I would do entrepreneurial and employable skills training for them, tell them how to save the money that we're getting from the business to later start their own initiatives. So it kind of became like a franchise for Smart Girls. I'm still doing the training and still getting them business and I was also kind of getting some little bit backside money for myself. Yeah. And then YALI happened in the process. [LAUGHING]

MR. PHILLIPS: And so with the YALI that you came over here. You spent time at Dartmouth.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: You developed skills and connections I would imagine, some of the relationships you —

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS:—you have made have been really useful. Can you talk about some of the people that you met through that experience who were really inspiring to you?

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, wow, I think YALI has been quite a life-changing experience for me. First of all, I meant, when we went to Dartmouth, they taught us this amazing thing that I'm still using up until now called Design Thinking and the Business Compass Model. That was, I think, the best capacity-building knowledge that I've gotten so far, because I'm now using it into the business and also teaching the ladies on how to use it and also with Rotary Uganda, they have adopted it in the program that we are doing.

But the best thing is YALI itself — after the people that I met there, the knowledge, the advice, the peer collaborators and how to build — do more training and capacity-building for the ladies. But the most amazing thing that I will never forget is my Obama moment, President Obama shout-out.

When I went back home — okay, I became famous because of President Obama. Yeah?

MR. PHILLIPS: So tell us that story. What's — I'm sure people want to know your Obama moment. So, paint the picture for us.

MS. MAYANJA: No, the picture is we were seated — because, you know, we have a presidential summit at the end of the fellowship and we get to meet President Obama. I went. I had just come in. I thought I had the worst seat ever. It was behind to the side. And then while I was in the hall, I got a call from the White House and they asked me, "So, how do you pronounce your name?" I'm like, "Jamila Mayanja." She kept on saying, "Okay, I think they may speak about you, but please don't tweet about it." I'm like, "What?" So the whole time, when everything was happening, it was really in my head, "Speak about me? What are these guys talking about?"

So he comes in. Everybody's shouting and he starts his — oh, God, he's amazing — starts his amazing speech. And then he starts mentioning about the few fellows that are doing amazing work—first mentioned some gentleman from Zambia, mentioned a lady Kadijah. And next, he's like, "And we have Jamila Mayanja." Oh my God, I jumped up. I almost shouted, "Hallelujah! Mashallah! What?" But I just shut up — and modeling—and he kept on saying, "Oh, she's modeling." And it was quite funny. He mentioned the work that I'm doing. And yeah, the moment ended, but it was so cool. So, [LAUGHING] yeah, that was the picture.

When I went home, oh my God, everybody wanted to shake my hand. Everybody wanted a hug. And I could give them the hugs, but while marketing my business, "By the way, I'm doing this." [LAUGHING] So everybody who would call me up and tell me, "Come and tell us about your Obama experience," after the Obama experience, I would tell them, "By the way, do you need washing clothes services? I do this and this."

So, that experience marketed my business quite big. I got featured in BBC, media all over the country. But it came with also bad things a bit. I wasn't prepared for that quick growth of the

business. Now I had so much business, my ladies were doing double work. So they were falling sick with their hands. And right now, I'm working with other fellows to try and rescale and rebrand, I would say. I'm working on building the first ever laundromat in the country, and it's going to run in containers, run on solar, use recyclable water. And next to it, I would have the training center, so my ladies won't have so much — how do you call it, manual labor? More of doing a service of maybe pick and delivery and maybe doing the laundry when people drop it off and have more time for the trainings, more time for their families, more time to plan for their businesses. And actually, some people who would come around to do their own laundry would have a chance to visit our training center. You never know, they might support someone. So, I'm consulting a Fellow who was in my — the best thing I also got from YALI was the networks. So I'm consulting a Fellow who was in our year, 2015, Daisy Karimi — she's an engineer for solar—advised on how I could work out with the solar. And also consulting another Fellow in Mauritius [INAUDIBLE] — he's an architect — to help me design out. Then I'm working with another Fellow who's a 2016. He's also an engineer, who will be also talking with also Daisy to make sure the solar panels are actually working. And I'm also working with another Fellow from 2016, Joseph Ddungu, who is very good with paperwork, to actually write out my paperwork and also working with the YALI Uganda Fellowship to help me rally and make sure the whole thing works out. So everything is quite YALI branded.

MR. PHILLIPS: It's a YALI project.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, I have to say, it's kind of nice to hear a story that starts with you walking into school, saying, "Jamila's awesome," to Barack Obama saying, "Jamila's awesome." And I think it's a nice capstone.

Well, thank you very much for coming. It's been a pleasure to have you here. Jamila Mayanja, who has done incredible work in Uganda, both focused on empowering women, but also moving beyond simply the idea of building confidence, but also identifying the means to grow a business.

[BACKGROUND MUSIC BEGINS]

And we wish you the best of luck with your work moving forward, and really appreciate the time you gave us today.

MS. MAYANJA: Thank you for having me. It was quite amazing.

MR. PHILLIPS: Good. Thank you.

Thank you everyone for tuning in to another YALI Voices Podcast. And thanks, Jamila, for a great conversation. You can reach Jamila on Facebook at Jamila Mayanja. She's also on Twitter at Jamwiltshire. That's Jamila. You can find her on Facebook and Twitter.

Be sure to come back for more inspiring stories from young African leaders of the YALI Voices Podcast. Join the YALI Network at [YALI.state.gov](http://YALI.state.gov), and be part of something bigger.

Our theme music is "E Go Happen" by Grace Jerry, and produced by her friends, the Presidential Precinct. The YALI Voices Podcast is brought to you by the U.S. Department of State and is part of the Young African Leaders Initiative, which is funded by the U.S. government. Thanks everybody.

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# **The Women's Luncheon at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit**

## **What is the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit?**

It's the largest engagement a U.S. president has ever had with African leaders and governments. The [U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit](#) will bring together 50 heads of state, along with a range of U.S. and African civil society and business leaders, to discuss the future of Africa.

## **What issues will the Summit address?**

The summit leader sessions will focus on topics such as trade and investment, peace and regional stability, and good governance. The signature events will address issues such as civil society, women's empowerment, global health, resilience and food security, and wildlife trafficking.

## **What will happen at the women's empowerment event?**

During the *Investing in Women for Peace and Prosperity* signature event, [U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power](#) will host a panel discussion that will emphasize the importance of investing in women for peace and prosperity; highlight African governments' effort to promote gender equality; and reaffirm African and U.S. commitments to advancing gender equality.

## **Why is this issue important to young African leaders?**

African women's leadership and meaningful participation across sectors and generations are central to sustainable development in Africa. Women's participation — in government, the economy, and society — accelerates economic growth, improves health and education, advances democratic governance and fosters peace and security.

When women have the same opportunities and access to resources as do men, the benefits extend beyond women themselves. As women work to strengthen their families and communities, they foster the education and health of the next generation, hasten economic growth and strengthen public and private institutions.

And when women succeed, nations succeed. In countries where women are empowered to participate and to lead, society is safer, more secure and more prosperous. That's because women's participation in and leadership of public and private institutions make these institutions more representative and more effective.

The United States is committed to supporting the efforts of its African partners and young African leaders to expand women's and girls' access to health care, education, clean water and proper nutrition; and to promote women's full participation in society.

**Photo credit: MCC**

## **What was the outcome of the Investing in Women, Peace and Prosperity Signature Event at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit?**

Jill Biden, wife of U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, opened the “Investing in Women for Peace and Prosperity” signature event at the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, where the United States committed new assistance to [advance women’s empowerment](#) in Africa. The support will bolster women’s participation in peace building and in parliamentary campaigns, assist in the development or implementation of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, and help women entrepreneurs to launch or expand businesses.

The United States will provide technical support to strengthen African Union and national-level efforts to address barriers to the equal participation of women in the agricultural sector. Through [wPOWER](#) and working with the [Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves](#), it will provide grants to organizations that promote the role of women entrepreneurs in selling clean technologies and that scale-up programs to educate adolescent girls on clean-energy technologies. The United States also will provide increased assistance to the Inter-Parliamentary Union to build the capacity of African parliaments working to advance gender equality and to support parliamentary campaigns on specific gender-equality issues.

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